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A LETTER

TO THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD COMMISSIONERS

ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THEIR INTENTION TO MAKE STATUTES FOR

BRASENOSE AND LINCOLN COLLEGES.

BY

CHR. WORDSWORTH, D.D.,

Bishop of Lincoln and Visitor of those Colleges.



Riseholme, Lincoln,

18th January, 1879.

TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD COMMISSIONERS.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

I have the honour to acknowledge a communication from you, dated January 11th last, in which you inform me, as Visitor of Brasenose College, and of Lincoln College, in the University of Oxford, that by virtue of the powers with which you have been invested by the "University of Oxford and Cambridge Act," 1877 (40 & 41 Victoria, chapter 48), you intend to proceed to make Statutes for those two Colleges.

Those two Colleges were founded by Bishops of Lincoln, and were commended by them to the care of their successors in the See of Lincoln. I should not therefore be discharging the duties of the trust committed to me with respect to them, if I did not request permission to submit to you some remarks concerning those societies.

Inasmuch also as in the Act of Parliament, by which your Commission is constituted, it is provided that notice should be given of your intention to frame Statutes to the Visitors of Colleges in Oxford, and you have now announced to me that intention accordingly; it seems to be contemplated by the Legislature, and to be implied in your announcement, that the Visitors should communicate to you such observations as may seem not unworthy of consideration.

Those two Colleges,—as appears from their Statutes,—were designed by their respective Founders to be Seminaries of Religion, and to be Schools of the Church of England. They were erected and endowed by Bishops of the Church for the encouragement of Sacred Literature and of Theological Learning; and for the training and maintenance of persons, either in Holy Orders, or destined for Holy Orders, in the Church.

In the original Statutes of Brasenose College, it is ordered, that all the Fellows should be in Holy Orders within seven years after their admission to their Master's Degree, or else resign their Fellowships.

The Statutes of Lincoln College (even as revised in the year 1855) enjoin that all the Fellows, except two, should be in Holy Orders within ten years after their admission to a Fellowship.

The Statutes of both these Colleges prescribe that their Heads should be in Holy Orders.

Such, my Lords and Gentlemen, were the designs and injunctions of the Founders of those Colleges : and the Endowments which they bestowed upon them were given in faith that those designs and injunctions would be fulfilled.

The Endowments formerly provided for the encouragement of Sacred Learning and Theological Study in the Church of England have been much diminished in late years by the sequestration of more than half the revenues of our Cathedral and Collegiate Churches. It is indeed to be acknowledged with thankfulness, that those Capitular revenues have not been secularized ; but have been applied to religious purposes, especially to the relief of spiritual destitution in populous places.

Still it cannot be doubted, that, from this and other causes, the Church of England is now in danger of declining from the high position which she has held among the Churches of Christendom, as possessing a learned Clergy, well-trained and qualified to refute erroneous opinions, and to defend the Christian Faith, and also, to contribute largely to the advancement of Literature and Science.

The Bishops of the Church have too much reason to regret, from their own personal experience, that our two ancient Universities do not now supply a due proportion of Candidates for Holy Orders, and that the average attainments in sound scholarship

and theological learning of our future Clergy will probably be far below what is to be desired.

This is the more to be lamented, because, at the present time, our national Institutions and our domestic peace and happiness are exposed to peril from the spread of Unbelief, and from the growth of Romanism.

It would therefore be a public calamity to the Church and Nation, if the endowments of our Universities and Colleges were now to be more largely abstracted, than is already unhappily the case, from the purposes to which their Founders assigned them, namely, the maintenance of the Christian Faith, and the promotion of Theological Learning, and the training of ministers for the service of the Church, and were alienated to secular uses, however excellent in themselves.

Such a diversion of those revenues would, I conceive, be also very injurious to our Colleges as places of national Education for the higher classes of society.

I do not mean to say, that Heads of Houses, and Fellows of Colleges in our Universities, being Clergymen, and being bound as such by their Ordination Vows to hold and teach the Christian Faith, and to lead Christian lives, and thus to train young men by their practice as well as by precept, will always fulfil those engagements. But the fact, that the principal members of the Governing Bodies of our

Colleges have been in Holy Orders, and were pledged as such by solemn stipulations, has inspired public confidence in their system of government; and it cannot be doubted, that the Colleges of England, as places of higher Education, owe much of their efficiency and success to their connexion with the Church of England. And if that connexion were severed or weakened, English parents and English families would, I believe, have reason to rue the result.

The condition of other Countries, where the endowments of the Church and of Academic Corporations have been secularized, and where the University and Collegiate life is not animated by the spirit of Christianity, may serve as a warning to England.

I am fully aware that there are some distinguished persons in our Colleges and Universities who would look on this separation from the Church without regret. But I may be allowed to observe, that our Colleges and Universities do not exist for the sake of any men—or any set of men,—however eminent, at any particular time, but for the sake of the English Nation. All Englishmen have a vested interest in the welfare of our ancient Colleges and Universities, and in the maintenance of their character as seminaries of sound Learning and religious Education. They are a noble heritage from the past; they are among the fairest ornaments of our country; and they are among the surest pledges of her strength and

glory for the future. And the essence, I venture to think, of their moral and spiritual life and vigour, and even of their intellectual power in the highest sense of the term, is their connexion with Christianity.

As Visitor of one of the two Colleges for which, as you inform me, you are now about to frame Statutes, I received a communication from the Governing Body of that College eight years ago, in which I was desired to comply with the request of the majority of that Governing Body (a small one) that the particular Statute of the College should be repealed, which prescribes that the Head of the College should be in Holy Orders.

I declined to give my assent to that proposal; which therefore fell to the ground. Let me state the reasons for that refusal, which were thus expressed in my answer to the application:—"The Founders of your College designed that it should be a religious Society; and for the maintenance of its religious character, it is, I think, very important that the Head of the College should (as is required by the Statutes) be qualified to preach the Word of God, and to administer the Holy Communion to those Students who are committed to his charge, and of whom he will have to give an account hereafter; and that he should thus be reminded of his own sacred duties towards them. And I should not be discharging my duty aright, as Visitor of the College, to its Founders and Benefactors, and to the College itself, and to

those Parents who send their sons to be educated there, if I were to give my assent to a proposal which, in my judgment, would have a manifest tendency to impair the character of the College as a place of Christian Education." Subsequent reflexion has confirmed me in the opinions which I then expressed, and I should feel much regret if I had complied with that request, and had given my consent to that proposal.

My Lords and Gentlemen, in this and similar matters my duty as Visitor* of those two Colleges, (founded by Bishops of Lincoln and entrusted by them to the care of their successors) is now at an end. It has passed into your hands. To you is committed the responsible office of making Statutes for these two Colleges, which during the course of centuries since their foundation have done good service to the Country and the Church. Their future destinies depend upon you.

I am thankful to believe, that the provisions of the Legislative Statute† under which you act, will

* The Visitor, concurrently with the Governing Body of the Colleges, was empowered, under certain conditions, to frame new Statutes for the College ; and also to prevent any old Statute from being altered, or any new one from being made.

† See the "Universities Act" (Sects. 14 and 15). "The Commissioners in making a Statute for the University or College, shall have regard to the main design of the Founder, except where it has ceased to be observed before the passing of this Act . . . They shall have regard to the interests of education, religion, learning, and research ; and in the case of a College or Hall shall have regard in the first instance to the maintenance of the College or Hall for those purposes."

enable and encourage you to maintain the religious character of these Societies. The high character of the persons, of whom your Commission is composed, inspires confident hope of good results to be derived from it ; and I earnestly pray that the Divine Blessing may rest on your consultations and endeavours for the benefit of those Institutions.

I have the honour to be,

My Lords and Gentlemen,

With much respect,

Your obedient and faithful Servant,

C. LINCOLN,

Visitor of Brasenose and Lincoln Colleges, Oxford.





